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DE RUEHTI #0408/01 111118

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 211118Z APR 06

FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4157

INFO RUEHPS/USOFFICE PRISTINA PRIORITY 3383

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0676

RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TIRANA 000408

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE (BENEDICT, SAINZ)

NSC FOR BRAUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KS](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE WISNER DISCUSSES KOSOVO STATUS TALKS WITH ALBANIAN LEADERS

REF: STATE 59894

Classified By: Ambassador Marcie B. Ries for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Albanian officials expressed appreciation for the USG role in the region and especially in Kosovo. All accepted the role that Wisner asked Albania to play as the Kosovo status negotiations advanced, and pledged that Albania would do its part to reach a successful conclusion.

Ambassador Wisner told PM Berisha, President Moisiu and other GoA officials that Albania should use its influence in Pristina to convince Kosovar leadership to be flexible in the negotiations on Kosovo's status. Ambassador Wisner said three issues needed to be resolved for the negotiations to proceed -- de-centralization, church property claims, and protecting minority rights. Ambassador Wisner also counseled the GoA to make extra effort to assuage the concerns of other countries in the region that there was no intention of re-thinking borders and creating a "Greater Albania." The goal of all this was to pull Serbia along to a place where it could co-exist peacefully with an independent Kosovo, and be a participant in regional prosperity. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) USG Kosovo Special Representative Ambassador Wisner held a series of meetings with Albanian government and opposition party officials, including President Moisiu, PM Berisha, Deputy FM Harxhi, and NGO representatives during his April 19-20 visit to Tirana. Ambassador attended the meetings as well.

AMBASSADOR WISNER: NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE DIFFICULT

¶3. (C) Ambassador Wisner told PM Berisha that the negotiations would be difficult, primarily because the political class in Belgrade had not yet accepted the fact that Kosovo would be independent. The trick was not to impose a solution on Serbia, but to find a way to "bring them along" so that the end result would not be a hostile Serbia bordering a new country in desperate need of economic growth.

Serbia's own fragile stability in the wake of Kosovo's independence constituted another factor.

¶4. (C) Three issues would dominate the initial stage of

negotiations: 1) de-centralization; 2) resolution of property claims by churches; and 3) establishing the basic principles for protecting minority rights. Ultimately, Kosovo would be independent, but a strong international presence would be needed for a transitional period and the EU would be expected to bear most of the financial burden to establish basic security services, an economic plan and budget assistance. He discounted speculation that the USG was preparing to "wash its hands" of the region, and said that the U.S. would remain deeply engaged and work closely with the EU.

¶ 15. (C) To achieve the goals sought by the USG and Albania, Ambassador Wisner said the GoA could do two things. First, work closely with Kosovo PM Ceku to encourage him to take the hard practical steps -- assure churches of protected lands, return lands to returning Serb families, for example. He also suggested that Kosovar leaders at all levels of government take additional steps to make Serb returnees feel welcome. Second, GoA leadership has to assuage the concerns of other countries that Albanians harbored dreams of re-thinking borders and creating a "Greater Albania." He encouraged PM Berisha to emphasize the GoA's commitment to fighting crime and corruption as part of this campaign because much of the fear of "Greater Albania" resided in the perception that more Albanian assertiveness and mobility means more crime in Europe.

BERISHA: IDEA OF "GREATER SERBIA" PERSISTS

¶ 16. (C) PM Berisha thanked Ambassador Wisner for the USG role in the Kosovo status process and stated his government's chief priority was to fight crime and corruption. Berisha added that Albania needed help with the fight against money

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laundering and would "pay any price" to join NATO in 2008. On Kosovo, Berisha said that in Serbia the idea of "Greater Serbia" still persisted and that de-militarization was needed. Kosovo leaders Ceku and Sediju were "committed" to doing what had to be done, but party leaders in Kosovo were not sending a strong enough message that the interests of ethnic Albanians were best served by reconciliation with ethnic Serbs. Berisha said he advised Ceku to use the position of the Serb Orthodox Church -- to keep Serbs in Kosovo -- to his advantage. He also felt that inter-religious dialogue would be effective, particularly if Don Vincenzo Paglia of the San' Egido Community was involved.

¶ 17. (C) Berisha noted that Ceku was not strong within his own party and needed visible USG support to help him weather internal dissent. Ambassador Wisner said the USG had and could continue to give Ceku strong support. Berisha said he agreed with all of Ambassador Wisner's suggestions and would encourage Ceku and others to be flexible on the initial set of issues and that he would assure regional leaders that Albania did not support border changes or ideas of Albanian unification. Berisha told Wisner that he -- like other Albanians -- had been raised to believe in "Greater Albania".

But the Kosovars' decision to pursue independence had changed all that and Albanians accept the Kosovar decision. Berisha added that international, and especially U.S., presence in an independent Kosovo was "fundamental" -- and a proposition accepted by all Kosovar leaders.

¶ 18. (C) Berisha put on the table the possibility that some would argue for denial of a UN seat for Kosovo as a face-saving measure for Serbia. Ambassador Wisner replied it was too early in the negotiation to consider such a strategy. He also doubted at end of the day this strategy would deliver Serb agreement. He stressed that now is the wrong time to consider such propositions -- the Serbs have given no such indication that there is a price short of their preferred position (i.e. "more than autonomy, less than independence").

¶ 19. (C) Berisha did not object to the notion of the need for

flexibility later in the day. He said he was committed to working closely with the Kosovars to keep them together in support of Ceku and his reconciliation program. He noted several times though that he worried about Ceku's position. He pledged he would play "Dutch uncle" to Kosovar political leaders, but would also push for strong measures aimed at reconciliation with Kosovar Serbs. Wisner underscored, and Berisha said he understood, that Kosovar Albanians must deny Belgrade any evidence either today or after independence that supports the contention that the Kosovars will not treat the Serb minority equitably.

HARXHI: WE SUPPORT AHTISAARI'S APPROACH

¶10. (C) In his meeting with Deputy FM Harxhi (FM Mustafaj was unavailable due to illness), Ambassador Wisner reiterated the need to "pull Serbia along" and urged the MFA to both use its "special ties" with Pristina to keep them pointed in the right direction while at the same time calm the fears of others in the region who worry of a "Greater Albania." Harxhi expressed support for Ahtisaari's approach in the negotiations and said that Albania understood that playing a moderate role benefited both Kosovo and the region. She said the initial focus on decentralization was good. She understood the negotiations had been "tedious" thus far, but was under the impression that the issue of status would be discussed on May 4. She also said she had heard rumblings of a Tadic-Sediju meeting. Ambassador Wisner explained the sequence of negotiations and dismissed the idea of a Tadic-Sedjiu meeting outside of the auspices of Ahtisaari, which he described as a "not a good idea."

MOISIU: STABILITY IN KOSOVO EQUALS STABILITY FOR EUROPE

¶11. (C) President Moisiu observed that resolving the Kosovo issue this year, meant stability not just for the region but also for Europe. Moisiu reported that he personally has met with Serb leaders and urged them to move beyond the past, be realistic, and look to the future. The Kosovars are doing just that. He identified as the most difficult issues for the Serbs their insistence that Kosovo is the "cradle of the Serb identity". Regarding religious monuments, he noted that many Albanians are themselves Christian. (NOTE: President Moisiu is Orthodox. End Note.) Turning to Albania's role in the region, the President stated firmly that "Albania will not ever ask for Kosovo to join Albania"; there should be no changes in borders, and Albania fully supports the position of the international community. Kosovo, he noted, should be independent, but must respect minority rights. At the same time there can be no double standards. The international community should apply the same standards for Kosovo independence that it applied to the other parts of the former Yugoslavia. Moisiu said he is arranging a meeting of regional Presidents at the end of the week to discuss regional security issues. He agreed that Albania could do more to advance the process by a) helping to convince regional leaders that Albanians had no designs on creating a "Greater Albania", and b) helping Kosovar Albanians navigate the negotiation process by urging them to be flexible and keep their eye on the desired result.

SP LEADERS: SERB LEADERS LACK VISION; ALBANIA CAN PLAY A ROLE

¶12. (C) Former PM and MOD, and current Socialist Party SecGen Majko told Ambassador Wisner there would continue to be problems during the negotiation process because political leaders in Belgrade, specifically President Kostunica and PM Tadic, lacked the courage to lead. None was willing to prepare the Serbian people for the inevitable outcome -- an independent Kosovo. In contrast, he said, Kosovo politicians have public opinion on their side, and expect the status question to be resolved this year. An unresolved Kosovo would create "unbalance" in the region. Belgrade was causing

problems because it wants to sell its cooperation for EU integration and a seat at the table. Majko predicted that Macedonia would have an excellent relationship with Kosovo, and that the Tirana-Pristina-Skopje triangle would function well politically and economically. Eventually, Greece would also become part of that group. In addition, armed with their traditions of religious tolerance, both Albania and Kosovo could be used to foster better relations in the Islamic world. Finally, Majko downplayed the idea of a "Greater Albania" arguing that, "Albanians will be three times as strong with an independent Kosovo, Albania, and the Albanian community in Macedonia." He agreed with Ambassador Wisner that Albania needed to convince its neighbor's that an independent Kosovo was not a threat to the region.

Roundtable with Opinion-makers

¶13. (C) Ambassador Wisner met with a roundtable of leading opinion-makers and NGOs dealing with regional issues. The participants noted the difficulty in understanding Ahtisaari's statement that Albania be "active, but not an actor." Wisner offered that Albania should decide its own role, and should be active in encouraging Kosovar leaders to engage on the issues currently on the table. Because of its relationship with Kosovo, Albania could play an important role in encouraging moderation on the Kosovar side as well as calming fears on the Serb side. The participants also queried whether the USG approach was the same as Brussels's. Ambassador Wisner responded it was.

¶14. (U) Ambassador Wisner cleared on this cable.
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